

George Washington Papers, Series 3, Subseries 3F, Varick Transcripts, Letterbook 3

BOARD OF GENERAL OFFICERS

New Windsor, June 12, 1781.

The Commander in chief informed the Board, that the principal Reason for his calling them together was, to make them acquainted with the Plan of Operations concerted between his Excellency the Count de Rochambeau and himself at their late Meeting at Weathersfield. He requested that they would at all Times in the Course of those

Operations, give him their Advice and Opinions, individually, without Hesitation or reserve, assuring them, that he should ever receive them with Thankfulness and that, altho Circumstances or other Considerations might sometimes lay him under the Necessity of taking Measures different from what might be proposed, he hoped that would be no Impediment to their still continuing to communicate to him their Ideas.

The Commander in Chief urged to the Board the necessity of œconomising Provisions, and recommended to the Generals, particularly the Brigadiers, the Necessity of inspecting the Returns made by their Commissaries upon every drawing Day, in Order to see that the Quantity of Rations drawn did not exceed the Number to which the Brigade was strictly intitled; assuring them that he should, in future, look upon them as answerable for any Irregularities upon this Head. He here took Occasion to state to the Board, generally, the present System of the Departments of Commissaries General of Purchases and Issues, and shewed the Impossibility of their being, upon their present Plan, a Check, as was intended, upon each other, and wished the Board to take the Matter into Consideration and report any Method which appeared to them more likely to answer the End proposed. He also desired them to take the following Matters into Consideration and report upon them accordingly.

1st: A Plan for the regular Inspection of the Magazines of Provisions; that the State of Provisions may not only be constantly known, but that the Commissaries may be called to

account for any Damage which may appear, owing to their negligence.

2d: Whether the Number of issuing posts to the northward of Virginia (agreeable to a return which will be laid before them by the Comy. General) appear to them necessary. If they do not; pointing out which, in their Opinions, ought to be abolished.

3d: A plan for Baking for the Army drawn up by General Knox.

4th: The proportion of Women which ought to be allowed to any given Number of Men, and to whom Rations shall be allowed.

5th: What Officers of the Staff shall be allowed to draw Waiters from the Line of the Army.

6th: Whether it will be safe during our Advance towards N York, and while we are operating against that place, to trust the posts at Kings ferry and West point to the following Garrisons, composed of the weakliest and worst Men, but who are always to remain in the Works assigned them.

C. LC. M. C. L. St. R&F. North Redoubts 1 2 25 Middle do 1 1 2 25 Island " 1 2 3 40 No. 1 " 1 2 25 2 1 2 " 25 3 " 1 1 2 25 4 " 1 1 2 25 Fort Putnam " 1 2 3 75 Webb " 1 1 10 Wyllys " 1 2 25 Clinton " 1 4 8 12 140 1 1 1 9 19 33 440 Kings Ferry " Stoney Point " 1 1 2 30 Verplanks do " 1 1 2 30 1 1 2 4 60 WestPoint " 1 1 1 9 19 33 440 Total " 1 1 2 10 21 37 500

7th: How soon will it be adviseable to encamp the Army. and what Place will it be best to draw them together in the first Instance.⁹⁰

90. In the writing of Jonathan Trumbull, jr. Members present, besides the Commander in Chief, were Major Generals Stirling, Howe, Parsons, McDougall; Brigadier Generals Knox, Paterson,

Hand, Huntington, and Du Portail. The general officers replied (June 13) to these queries in a 6-page folio document. This reply is in the *Washington Papers*.

To THE GENERAL AND FIELD OFFICERS OF THE ARMY

April 19, 1782.

The Commander in Chief submits the papers accompanying this, containg the Case of Capt Joshua Huddy⁹⁸ lately hanged within the County of Monmouth in N Jersey State, by a party of the Enemy, to the Consideration of the Genl Officers and Commandg Officers of Brigades and Regiments. And thereupon requests from them, seperately and in Writing, a direct and laconic Reply to the followg Queries: Vizt:⁹⁹

1st. Upon the State of Facts in the above Case, is Retaliation justifiable and expedient?

2d. If justifiable, Ought it to take place immediately? Or should a previous Representation be made to Sir Hy Clinton, and Satisfaction demanded from him?

3d. In Case of Representation and Demand, who should be the person or persons to be required?

4th. In Case of Refusal, and Retaliation becomg necessary, of what Description shall the Officer be on whom it is to take place; and how shall he be designated for the purpose?¹

98. Of the New Jersey State artillery, according to the affidavit of Daniel Randolph, Apr. 15, 1782, sworn to before Brig. Gen. David Forman (who was also a judge of the court of common pleas of Monmouth County). He was captured at Tom's River by a body of Refugees on March 24; carried to New York and kept in irons until April 8, when he was put on board a sloop and carried to Sandy Hook and there confined on a guard ship until April 12. On that date Captain Huddy was hanged by the Refugees, who accused him of having killed the Refugee, Philip White. White, by Refugee affidavits, was killed on March 30, while Huddy was a prisoner in irons in New York. The first information Washington received of Huddy's death came in a letter from the

Exchange Commissioners, Knox and Morris, at Elizabethtown, April 16, which was brought to the Commander in Chief by General Forman, who brought, also, sundry affidavits respecting Huddy's death.

99. Heath's *Memoirs* state that the officers answered the queries in writing without conversing on the subject, until all the answers had been signed, sealed, and sent to the Commander in Chief. Twenty-five officers sent in their opinions and all 25 agreed that retaliation was "justifiable and expedient." Twenty-two were in favor of a representation to Sir Henry Clinton before acting. It was the unanimous opinion that the leader of the party of Refugees who had hanged Huddy should be demanded from the British and be made the subject of retaliation. The 25 opinions, dated Apr. 19. 1782, are in the *Washington Papers*.

1. The draft is in the writing of Jonathan Trumbull, jr.

COUNCIL OF GENERAL OFFICERS

Newburgh, April 15, 1782.

The Commander in Chief states to the General Officers

That, from the best information he has been able to obtain, the regular force of the enemy in New York, at this time, including their established Provincial Corps amounts at least to Nine thousd. Men.

That the City Militia, Volunteer Companies, Rangers, and some other small Corps in the Town, amounted by a report made to the Secretary of State⁸⁴ in the Winter of 1780 (when the enemy apprehended an attack on N York and were preparing for defence) to 3390 Men, exclusive of Sailors and Marines, and that this is the best criterion by which he can form a judgment of their present strength.

That the enemys force in Charles Town by the last information, and estimation of it, consisted of 3300 Men.

That the Garrison of Savanna in Georgia, he conceives, cannot be less than 700 Men.

That even among men of political knowledge and judgment a diversity of Sentiment prevails respecting the evacuation of the Southern States. That if this event should take place, and the whole force of the enemy shd. be concentrated at New York, it will stand thus.

Regr. Troops now at N. Yk 9000

From Chas. Town 3300

Savanna 700

Regrs. 13000

Militia &ca. at N. York. 3390

Total 16,390

Under this state of the Enemys force the Commander in Chief requests the opinion of the Genl. Officers seperately,

84. Secretary for Foreign Affairs.

and in writing, upon the following hypothetical questions.

First. Supposing the enemys force at New York to be as above. That they retain possession of the Harbor of New York, and that, they have a Naval superiority upon this Coast.

Secondly. Supposing the same force; that they keep possession of the harbour; but loose their superiority at Sea.

Thirdly. That they shall have the same force in the City; but shall loose the command of the Water both in the harbour and at Sea.

Is there, it is asked, a probability in all, or either of these cases that we shall be able to obtain Men, and means sufficient to undertake the Siege of New York?

What efficient force will be necessary for the enterprise in the cases wch. may be deemed practicable? And what number of Militia ought to be demanded to secure this force? If the enemy should not re-inforce New York with their Southern Troops, and none should arrive from Europe, their force at that place will then be

Regulars 9000

Militia &ca 3390

Total 12,390

The Commander in Chief propounds the same questions, identically, on this number as he did on the larger one (of 16390) and requests that they may be answered accordingly; numbers only making the difference of the cases.

That every information may be received, which is in the power of the General to give, to form a judgmt. on these questions, he adds,

That the Northern Army will (at present) be composed of the Regiments from New Hampshire to New Jersey inclusive, also of Hazens; Lambs and Cranes Regiments of Artillery; and the Sheldons Legionary Corps.

That the total number of R. and File in the above Regiments of Infantry, by the last Genl. return in his possession, amounts to [8005]; but from this the deductions incident to all services, and peculiar to ours, are to be made, to come at the efficient strength.

That it is not in his power to inform what strength these Regiments will be brought to in season for an operation against New York; he can only [say], that every argument he was master of has been urged to the respective States to have them compleated to their full establishment.

That in case the enemy shd. evacuate the Southern States, the Continental Troops in that Qr., as far at least as North Carolina, will be ordered to rejoin the Main Army; but their numbers being small, and the March great, the support from them cannot be much. 2500 Men is the most that can be expected.

That in the month of [March] last, he apprised the States from Delaware Eastward, that the Plans, and operations of the Campaign might require a considerable aid of Militia; and entreated that the Executive of each might, to avoid delay, be vested with sufficient powers to order them out for three Months Service, to commence on their joining the Army. and.

That the French force on the Continent at this time, does not, he believes, exceed 4000 effective Men, whether any, or what further succours are to be expected from our Allies is as yet, unknown to him.

[The Comandr in Chief concludes the above State of Matters]⁸⁵ with the following observation, that offensive operations, of whatever kind they may be (being generally the result of choice) ought to be undertaken with due consideration of all circumstances and a moral certainty of succeeding; for besides involving the Public in a heavy expence, wch. the situation of our Affairs can illy afford, disgrace and censure scarce ever fail triumph at our Misfortunes.⁸⁶

***To THE SECRETARY AT WAR**

Newburgh, April 25, 1782.

My dear Sir: Your private letter of the 2d. Instt. came to my hands the 20th. by Doctr. Craik. I am much indebted to you for the sentiments and calculations contained in it. You have however, if my

information and estimation of the Enemy's strength in New York is right, fallen a good deal short of *their* numbers, and if I may be allowed to ground an opinion upon present appearances,

85. Washington's original draft read: "This state of matters is concluded with the following etc."

86. The words in brackets are in the writing of Jonathan Trumbull, jr. Washington's draft is marked by him for a different arrangement of the paragraphs: but the above order is that of the Varick Transcripts in the Library of Congress and also of the document sent to Major General Heath, which is in the Massachusetts Historical Society.

The opinions of the general officers in response to these queries were: Stirling (submitted April 20): Favorable to an attempt. Paterson (April 26): Was opposed, but inclined to think that in the event of the third contingency, the siege should be undertaken. Heath (May 6): Opposed. Howe (May 8): Difficult, but not impossible. Hand (May 9): Doubtful. Steuben (June 10): Impracticable. All the opinions discussed the problem at length and were, more or less, contingent upon the size of the attacking force. The possibility of raising the sufficient number of men was considered doubtful. The original opinions are in the Washington Papers.

information and past experience, I should think you have greatly over-rated *our* prospects. consequently, that which seems to be a matter of no doubt in your mind, constitutes all the difficulty in mine, in pointing the operations of the present campaign towards New York.

I am persuaded the enemy have not, at this time, less than 9000 regular Troops in New York and its dependencies; including their established Provincial Corps. and by a report from the Commandant of that place to Lord George Germain in the Winter of 1780, when they expected an Attack from us, it appears that of City Militia, Volunteer Companies, and some other small Corps which were named; exclusive of Marines, Sailors and Delancys Refugees; they had in Arms, regularly organized for defence of the Town 3390 Men. These added to their regular forces make a body of 12,390 independent of their Southern Army; which I estimate at 4000 more; making altogether 16,390 besides Sailors and Marines. But, as an augmentation of the force in New York is, as yet, only problematical, I will suppose that the Enemy do not mean to withdraw their Southern

Garrisons, and that no re-inforcements will arrive from Europe, which is the most favourable point of view the matter can be placed in; we still have (besides Sailors and Marines which always will be more, or less, accordingly to the number of Ships in the harbour) 12,390 Men opposed to us, in Works which are growing into consistency and strength every day.

You think, and I very readily concur with you in opinion, that the Besiegers *ought* to be at least three times the number of the besieged, upon European principles, if

New York was regularly fortified, we ought to have as 5 or 6 to 1. but I will set it at the lowest; and without demanding any thing for Marines or Sailors, the number of Men required will be 36, 170.

How to obtain them is the next enquiry. Our present strength by the last returns is

R & F. R & F. 2 Regts. of N: Hampse. 441 542 10 Do. Massachusetts 2786 3382 1 Rhode Island 219 341 5 Regts. Connectt. 1275 1577 2 Ditto N. York 809 912 2 Ditto N. Jersey 638 740 1 Ditto Hazen 279 384 1 Ditto Invalids 184 244 24 Regts. Infantry 6631 8122 1 legionary Corps 230 250 2 Regts. of Artillery 642 774 Marischausse supe. 30 Contine. force at this time 7533 9146

The column on the right, exhibits the total number of R: and file in the line of each state; the other, supposing the sick to keep the same ratio, and it is not great, gives every man that is to be expected from Regiments of the strength that ours are.

Having shewn the actual strength of the line, I shall next give the information upon which my opinion of recruits for it, is founded.

New Hampshire.

A Letter from Colo. Dearborn dated March 10th., says: the Assembly at their last meeting had done nothing; that they were to meet again the 15th; that he fears it will be too late for them to do much; that there does not appear a disposition to great exertions; that the Men in power despair of raising either *Men* or *Money* "to any considerable amount". and therefore he fears, they will not take the

matter up with as much spirit as he could wish, and concludes, if Men can be had, he is convinced Mr. Morris will receive very little of the Supplies, unless he will take it in specific articles.

Massachusetts bay:

Your knowledge of matters in this State much exceeds mine. All the official information I have received from it, has been through you; not one of my Letters to the Governor has been acknowledge; nor do I know whether any of them ever got to hand, except the one wch. you speak of as having been laid before a Comee. of the Assembly. One fact however is certain, and it is important. Viz, of 2994 Men returned to the State as its deficiency the Assembly voted *1500 only* ; when it must be obvious to every considerate mind, that these deficiencies encrease daily, and in the nature of things must continually do so, while deaths and desertions are incident to Armies.

Rhode Island

Altho' Colo. Olney speaks of some difficulties, this State, will I expect, go near to compleat its Regiment with 9 Months Men, (the term for which they are enlisted), to commence from the time of their passing Muster by which means many of

them will be discharged in Novemr, and near all of them in Decembr.

Connecticut,

Instead of 1475 Men wch. by returns from the line of the State they were deficient of Jany. last, is about to give 700 ; five hundred of these Genl. Huntington in a letter of the 10th. Instt. writes me he thinks will be got by the end of May, and that two thirds of them will have to serve till the first of Jany. or for one year only.

New York.

Will, I believe, go near to compleat her quota, by Drafts to serve till the first of Jan: next

New Jersey.

Has not the most distant prospect that I can see, of doing this; her recruiting depends upon voluntary Enlistments, at a small bounty, by which a man *now* and *then* only is obtained. Pennsylvania, Delaware and Maryland.

Pursue the same mode of Jersey, and I dare venture to pronounce will have the same success. But as the Troops of these States by a resolve of Congress are designated part of the Southern Army, I do not see how the recruits of them can be brought into this estimate, unless by the evacuation of Charles Town our force to the Southward should move this way; in which case and upon the principle here established, it ought to consist of 12,000 Men, to counterpoize the Enemy's 4000; but admitting they should join the Northern instead of the Southern Army, their numbers from everything I can hear, do not exceed 600.

Under this state of matters, and the experience of two years; particularly the last, when a favourite enterprize was fairly announced, and every argument which my invention could suggest was urged in vain to induce the States to compleat their Ballns; I have not a single ray of hope that more than what follows will be obtained, each State line and Corps then will stand thus.

R & File N: Hampshe. prest. streth. 441 Recruits 200 641 Massachusetts bay 2786 Recrts. (besides Artiy.) 1000 3786 Rhode Island prest. 219 Recruits 250 469 Connecticut, pret. 1275 Recruits bess. Horse 500 1775 New York, prest. strength 809 Recruits besides Artillery 200 1009 New Jersey 638 Desertions will keep pace with Recg. 638 Hazens Regt. no Rects. expd. 279 Invalid Regt. none but from the line 184 Sheldons Legion 230 Recruits (from Cont.) 70 300 Lambs Regt. Artilly. 242 Rects. from N. York 158 400 Cranes Artillery 374 Rects. from Massts. 100 474 Mareschause Corps 30 Efficient Continls. 9985 Deduct for the Garrisons of: Wyoming 50 Verplanks point 50 Stoney Point 50 Dobbss. ferry 25 West point (altho it shd. be coverd by the Army) at least to secure the works 750 925 Besides these, to compleat the Investiture of New York, and deprive the Garrison therein of Supplies, a small flying Corps shd. be in Jersey remns. and is card. over 9060 Add the French Troops in Virga. (wch. at this time cant exced for duty) 4000 Total regular Troops 13060 Wantg. to treble the Enemys force 24100 proof 37160

It now remains to be determined:

1st. Whether it is probable that 24,100 Militia can be had, if they are required.

2d. Whether a less, and what number of Men, the Siege of New York may be undertaken with.

3d. Whether it is prudent to make a requisition of the Militia before the succours from France (if any are coming) is announced to us, or wait this event, as each State from Delaware Eastward has

been informed (by a circular letter of the of March)⁵¹ that it was highly probable the operations of the Campaign would make the aid of Militia necessary, and requesting very urgently that the Executive might be vested with ample powers to call them out, properly equipped for three Months, the time of Service to commence from the period at which they join the Army.

With respect to the first question *I* am clear that 24,100 cannot be had.

In answer to the 2d, if the Enemy continue divided, and we cannot (when all the Aids which are intended us, are disclosed) attempt something important, and more certain in another quarter, I should be disposed to undertake the Siege of New York with double the Enemys numbers, provided a Naval superiority comes early to our assistance, and will engage to cooperate during the siege; because I should hope that time and spirited exertions might effect (tho' with more toil and hazard) what numbers alone are generally thought competent to.

On the 3d. question I must observe that as the States have been prepared for a call of their Militia nothing further can well be done at this time, under our present State of uncertainty, nor do I believe that anything but expence wd. result from the measure; for while the mass of the People, or the Executives of the States, take upon them to judge of the time proper for drawing out their Militia and will wait till the necessity for it is obvious to the common and uninformed understandings of the multitude, it is of little avail to make requisitions of this sort, as

51. See Circular to the Eastern and Middle States, Mar. 5, 1782, *ante*.

the mischief resulting from it is as influential upon any plan which may be in contemplation as inability, or want of inclination possibly can be.

Upon the whole, altho' I have not made up my mind fully the impracticability of attacking New York, I am inclined to believe that without the aid of 5 or 6000 French Troops, in addition to those in Virginia, we should find the conquest of New York an arduous task, and that if the enemy concentrate their force at that point it will be scarcely possible with any means I have a knowledge of at prest. However as these thoughts are thrown together more for your animadversions upon them than as expressions of my opinion, I shall be obliged to you for your remarks with the utmost freedom and candor; as it is by discussions of this sort the judgment is informed, and plans become properly matured.

I shall not in this letter give any opinion respecting either of the other objects mentioned in yours. they are subordinate, and must all yield to New York, if means can be found to attempt that plan, upon a well grounded hope of succeeding; it is for this reason I wish to have everything relative to it, well considered before the enterprize is either adopted, or rejected. With the most perfect esteem etc.